



Out of the Ashes: Our Seaboard Station Museum 20 Years Later



Interior shots of the fire damage

It has been 20 years since the tragic November 23, 1994 fire that almost destroyed Suffolk's historic 1885 railroad station. Concerned citizens, outraged by the City Inspection Department's declaration that the station was a safety hazard and should be immediately demolished, wrote by the hundreds in protest. Betsy Brothers (of SNHS) and Bob Chissom (of the Suffolk Main Street program) joined together and soon the battle cry of "Save Our Station" rang through the streets of Suffolk.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of the S.O.S committee and countless others who showed their support we were able to not only keep the station from demolition but painstakingly restore it. Now it stands proudly on Main Street and represents the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society as our public museum. *Read more about Save Our Station on page 3.*

As a private non-profit our station museum relies entirely on donations from its visitors and SNHS membership dues.

The Station Through The Years

1918



Photo from: *Virginia Railway Depots* by Donald R. Traser pg.145
from the William E. Griffin, Jr., Collection
June 17, 1918

1953



Photo from: <http://virginianrailwayheritagetrail.blogspot.com/>
1953

1999



Far Left: Save Our Station

Left: Breaking ground:
Tom Woodward, Everett
Birdsong, Construction
Co Representative, and
Barbara McPhail

Our beautiful 1885
Queen Anne styled
station today!

Photo Courtesy of
Kevin Sary



Today!

In March of this year the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society welcomed a new President: Mary Austin Darden. A Suffolk-native herself, Mary Austin brings her years of personal history and connection to the Historical Society and we look forward to continuing our journey together.

Letter From the President:

Growing up in Suffolk I would consistently find myself volunteering. I remember binding the booklets for Riddick's Folly; hosting for the Christmas Candlelight Tour; and learning to make boxwood wreaths. All of this to honor Suffolk's history.



I was just one of many, many volunteers. Therefore, I would like to thank all of the tireless volunteers of the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society. Some are always available for special events. Others see it as their calling. One person in particular comes to mind - Sue Woodward.

As many of you know, Sue has been part of the Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society since its infant years. She is the "go-to" person when you have a question. She weaves a story about Suffolk History that is engaging and educational. It is with much sadness that Sue has stepped down as the SNHS Historian. Her daily presence in the Phillip-Dawson House will be missed. We are lucky that she is just a hop-skip-and-a-jump away. Thank you Sue!

-Mary Austin Darden

"In August of this year, the Suffolk Seaboard Railroad Museum will mark 15 years of operation. Saving the Train Station was a labor of love and pure tenacity that started with a fire in 1994 that nearly destroyed the building. Members of the Historical Society were outraged at the proposal by the city to tear down this historic building that has stood on Main Street since 1885. At the time of the fire, the entire area was an eyesore but Betsy Brothers, then president of SNHS, and others had a passion and a vision to "Save Our Station," SOS. Within weeks of the fire, the SOS committee was formed and began the long commitment to raise funds and awareness to save the building. Grants were applied for and rejected the first time around, but then things began to happen when the city staff became involved in the effort. With their expertise, a federal transportation grant was submitted and awarded in the amount of \$240,000. The public/private partnership that developed between the City and the Historical Society raised \$60,000 in matching funds required by the grant. The timing was perfect because the City was interested in starting a major downtown revitalization and the Train Station would be a starting point.



By 1999, VDOT gave final approval to the plans and bids for the restoration were received. Everett Birdsong became the chairman of the SOS committee, an ad hoc committee of the SNHS. Other members of that committee who oversaw the project were George Blair, Betsy Brothers, Jim Caton, George Consolvo, Randy Hicks, Tommy Hines, Jim McLemore, Barbara McPhail, Richard Pond, Lynn Rose, and Sue Woodward. The design contract was awarded to Hanbury, Evans, Newill, Vlattas with Greg Rutledge serving as architect for the project. Viteri Construction Management, Inc. was given the construction contract so work could begin with the ground breaking ceremony for the project held on November 16, 1999. Over the next few months a remarkable change took place at the Station, and we all fell in love with the "little building that could." It went from a derelict eyesore to the jewel of Main Street. In addition, Jim McLemore designed a very unique HO scale model train layout depicting Suffolk in 1907. The men worked on that model for years and it is still the showpiece of the building.

When the doors opened in August of 2000, we were thrilled when the City decided to put the then fledgling visitor center in our building. We shared the space until the City decided to move the Visitors Center in order to help support the restoration of the Prentis House across the street and SNHS was left not knowing quite what to do. Over the years there has been much discussion about the use and future of the Station. Each year the Historical Society and the Train Station Committee find a way to keep the doors open. Financially it can be a struggle, but people love our Station. There are families who visit every week with children who cannot get enough of the Station. Thousands of people from all over the world have visited the Station and heard the history of Suffolk as told by volunteers and our museum coordinators. The railroad model presents the perfect avenue to inform adults and school children of our rich history. The Station continues to be featured in many City of Suffolk publications and promotional materials, in newspapers and on local TV stations as well.

So here we are 15 years later. A lot has happened on Main Street and in our City since August of 2000, but thankfully, due to the efforts of the members of SNHS and the SOS committee, the Train Station dodged the wrecking ball and still sits as an anchor to Main Street, serving as a living history for today and hopefully for years to come. It truly is the jewel of the Historical Society. We can only hope the passion the members of the Historical Society shared for this project 20 years ago will live on as an example of what can be done when you have a vision and a commitment to make a difference by preserving the past as you prepare for the future." — *Thank you to our Train Station contributor for this piece*



Spring Member Meeting Feedback

Thank you to everyone who made it out to our Spring Membership Meeting in March! We appreciate your time and loved hearing your feedback about how we're doing. We heard what you had to say and we will continue to work to bring you the content and accessibility you desire. Here are some of your suggestions:

What are we doing well?	What should we change?	What programs interest you?	Other Comments?
Heirloom Sale	Bring back the speaker series	Nansemond Indians Black history	Name the music (soon to be exhibits) room for Sue Woodward
Newsletter	Make the Dawson House handicap accessible	History of the lumber business	Have a membership booth at Touch-A-Truck
Civil War Tours	Tiered member benefits	Historical building preservation	Building needs a sign
Candlelight Tour	Add an activity at each Candlelight Tour house	Geocaching	Attract younger members
Email reminders	Improve publicity	WWII in Suffolk/ Revolutionary War	More outreach programs



Jane Arthur and Lynn Cross
Photo courtesy of Hugh Cross

Don't see your idea? Let us know! 757-539-2781
info@suffolkhistory.org

Thank you to our volunteers: Tommy Arthur, Jane Arthur, Barbara McPhail, Marie Baker, Jeanne Carmean, Lee King, Dempsey Burgess, Sue Woodward, Sandra Council, Nita Bagnell, Susan Musick, Mary Austin Darden, Susannah Donahue, Kay Goldberg, Gary Butler, Larry Riddick, Robert Baker, Maryanne Riddick, Hazel White and Lynn Cross

Speaker Series Presents: Preventative Conservation in the Museum and at Home by SNHS Executive Director, Ashley Nicole Lorenzen



This April we kicked off our Speaker Series with a talk given by me! The talk focused primarily on the various policies and procedures needed to safe-guard museum collections with tips for ways to translate that in a home environment.

The biggest safety take-away? Plan Ahead! You can never tell when a natural disaster may strike and having a good plan in place beforehand may save both lives and your objects.

The next tip? Document Everything! Oh, I know, when you take that picture you think you'll always remember who's in it and where you were. But trust me: You won't. And even if you have a memory like a steel trap your family won't know everything you do so: Write. It. Down! In pencil. Please always label in pencil whenever possible. Even if you do nothing else labeling will make everyone's job easier in the future.

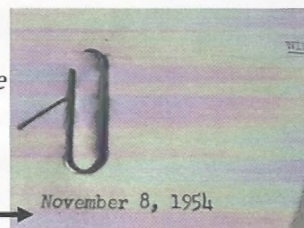
If you have any questions about how to handle something in your own collections feel free to call the Phillips-Dawson House (757-539-2781) or send an email to info@suffolkhistory.org

Thank you to everyone who made it out to the talk and especially to our hospitality volunteers who made such delicious refreshments!



Special thanks to Kermit Hobbs, Nita Bagnell, Sandra Council, Hazel White, and Lynn Cross.

An example of what NOT to do: This metal paperclip has likely been on this paper since 1954 and you can see the stains rust has left on the page. Plastic paperclips are a better alternative if you must use them.



Spring Civil War Tours with Kermit Hobbs



"Sibley and A-Tent" at Fort Huger in Isle of Wight County

Photo credit: <http://archcon.org/investigations/fort-huger-project/>
Photographer: Alex Gardner

April 11th and 12th were perfect days for visiting places where Suffolk history was made during the Civil War. Kermit Hobbs has been leading such tours every spring since 2003 and providing answers to the many history related questions that people ask. In the past, tours have drawn visitors from other states, some as far away as Texas.

Traditionally, there was a two hour Saturday morning round trip tour that featured easily accessible sites where little walking was required, followed by a three hour round trip tour in the afternoon for people who could manage the half-mile round hike through the woods to Fort Rosecrans.

Because of the limited seating capacity of the bus, visitors have often been turned away in the past. This year, however, an afternoon tour was added on Sunday that enabled more people to participate. All three tours ran at or near capacity, and there was no shortage of questions.

The dates for the 2016 tours have not been set, but if you would like to be contacted in advance for next year, please email Kermit at khobbs5@aol.com.

Thank you Kermit for your continued support! We appreciate all you do for our Historical Society!

Calendar of Events

June 20th	The Train Station's Hands-On-History Day 10am-2pm (free) 326 N. Main St
July	Speaker Series #2 (TBA)
September 5th	Heirloom Sale Accepting donations now
October 3rd	Touch-a-Truck Sponsors & Volunteers Needed! Call 757-923-4750
October 5th	Fall Members' Meeting
December 5-6	39th Annual Candlelight Tour



News from the Phillips-Dawson House

The work continues here at the Phillips-Dawson House; this time upstairs! Soon we will have a second office space available to help us conduct our research and continue the work of cataloging our collections. On the to-do list of repairs are the plaster ceilings, new lights, and a paint job. We can't wait to show off the finished product!

As summer approaches we have many exciting opportunities opening for volunteers! If you know any history fans interested in helping us with inventory and research let us know! (*high school and older preferably*)

Believe it or not September is just around the corner and that means our Heirloom Sale! We are always accepting donations, so give us a call to set up an appointment to drop off your items. The sale features vintage and heirloom items for purchase with the proceeds benefiting the Dawson House fund. Fundraisers such as our Heirloom Sale ensure that the much needed repairs to our headquarters can continue and our collection properly maintained.



It is with deep regret that we bring you the news that our long-time historian, Sue Woodward, has stepped down from her role on our Board to pursue other avenues of Suffolk history. She assures us that she will remain active in Society functions and be available as needed. We wish to thank her for her many years of service and support.

News from the Train Station

April brought more than just rain showers to the Train Station; it brought an increase in tours, too! The Daughters of the American Revolution visited on the 1st followed by a visit from The Nansemond Suffolk Academy 3rd graders who toured the Station and caboose and learned about railroad history in Suffolk.

Come put your Hands-On-History with us June 20th! This free, family-friendly event will feature artifacts and activities highlighting Suffolk's railroading history and our beautiful 1885 Station. The fun will happen from 10am to 2pm and we hope to see you there!

It may seem early but a Touch-a-Truck event planner's work is never done! We are still very much in need of sponsors as well as volunteers to make this year's event a success!



We have new gift shop items in stock so check them out before they're gone!

Thank You to Our 2015 Members!

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Don't see your name? Renew your membership ASAP! This will be your last newsletter if membership dues are not received by July 1. If you are unsure of your membership status or level, please give us a call at 757-539-2781 and we will be happy to assist you!

***2015 Board Members**

Historical Society Wish List

The Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization which means we rely on you, our members, to survive! Unfortunately running a business, even a nonprofit one, requires a lot of supplies and our limited budget means we don't always have everything we need. We've created a wish list of our most needed supplies and materials that, if you are interested and able, you can donate to our Society.

SNHS is a 501(c)3 organization and all donations, monetary or physical, are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Office Supplies:

- *Printer paper (ream or case)*
- *Epson Ink, #254 (BLK), #252 (CYMK)*
- *Scissors*
- *Postage Stamps*
- *Plain (#10) envelopes*
- *Legal pads*
- *#2 pencils*
- *Sharpies (all colors)*
- *Crayons*
- *Card Stock (all colors)*
- *Colored Pencils*

General Supplies:

- *Variable Speed Vacuum Cleaner*
- *Swiffer Dry Duster Cloths*
- *Cloth rags*
- *Broom and Dust Pan*
- *Trash Can Liners*
- *Insect sticky traps*
- *Toilet Paper*
- *3-Prong Extension Cord(s)*
- *Step Ladder*

Archival Supplies:

- *Gaylord 6-compartment Archival Artifact Tray*
- *Gaylord 1 1/2" O-Ring Preservation Box Album*
- *Gaylord Buffered Acid-Free Tissue (100 count)*
- *Gaylord White Ethafoam Planks (6-Pack)*
- *Cotton Twill Labeling Tape*
- *Gaylord Classic Archival Storage Carton with Handles*

We purchase our Archival Materials primarily from Gaylord Archival (www.gaylord.com) but some can be found in art supply stores as well.

If you wish to donate supplies, please either drop them off at our headquarters, 137 Bank St., Suffolk VA 23439, during business hours (M-Th, 9am to 4pm) or mail them to us at PO Box 1255. Please feel free to give us a call at 757-539-2781 if you have questions.

Are We There Yet?

Anyone traveling with children has likely heard this question a thousand times but did you know we hear it, too? Without a sign visible from the street many of our visitors don't know where we are! This year we plan to remedy this by having a new sign installed where everyone can see it! As you might guess, this will be an expensive project, but we feel an important one. If you agree, please consider donating to our Historical Society to help us show everyone where we are!

Thanks to our 2015 corporate members:

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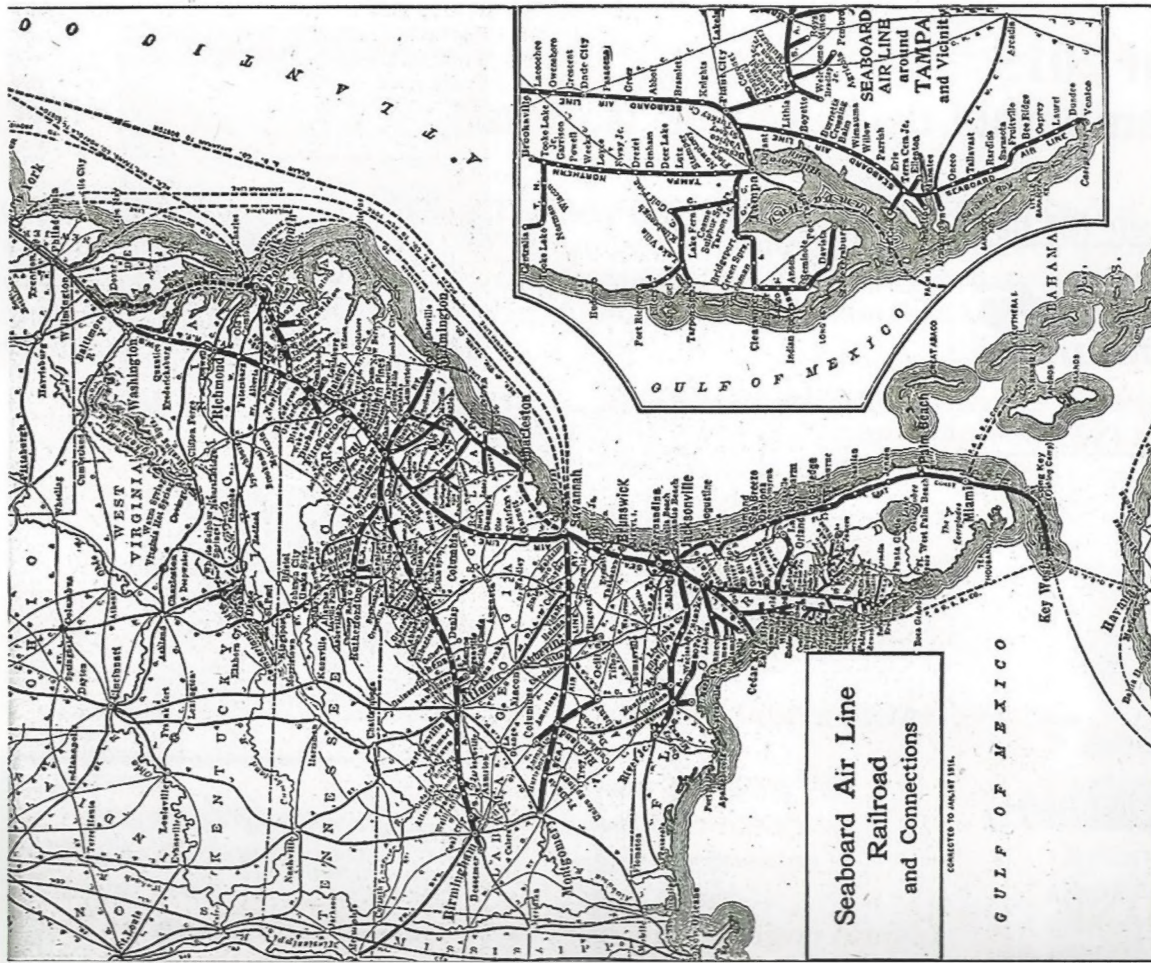
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Denise Dooley, Train Station Coordinator



1916 map of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad system, reprinted in the 1922 New World Atlas and Gazetteer

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Our Suffolk Seaboard Station Railroad Museum gets its name from the Seaboard Airline Railroad.